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Teen wants someone punished**BYLINE:** CHANDRA BROADWATER**SECTION:** HERNANDO TIMES; Pg. 1**LENGTH:** 1490 words**DATELINE:** BROOKSVILLE

He was placed in the foster care of a man who had previously been reported for sex abuse.

Times Staff Writer

The story of sexual abuse first unfurled from the lips of a Hernando County 17-year-old as he sat in the passenger seat of his former caseworker's car.

It was Dec. 15, and the two had been at a meeting that day at the Ocala headquarters of Kids Central Inc., which has a contract with the state to administer foster care in Hernando County. They were heading down the highway, returning to Hernando that evening.

In the quiet car, the teen told Cecilio Deleon about what had happened to him and to others while they stayed with Kejerald C. "K.J." Jackson, a 30-year-old Brooksville foster parent.

The teen told Deleon about how he had come home from work one day. It was about a month into his stay with Jackson, which began in April 2006.

Jackson approached him. The foster parent pinched the teen's nipples, then wrestled him to the ground. He put his hands down the teen's pants just before the boy got away.

Later, the 17-year-old also noticed a cable bill with his name on it. The teen said that Jackson had used his Social Security number and other private information to open the account.

The teen's story led Deleon to file an abuse report

with the state on Dec. 18. A state Department of Children and Families official in Tallahassee then notified the Hernando Sheriff's Office.

Over the next few weeks, police interviewed the teen and three others. One 13-year-old and two 17-year-olds also said Jackson also had touched them inappropriately. He performed sexual acts on them as well.

Since Jackson's arrest Jan. 12 - he was charged with attempted sexual battery, multiple counts of lewd and lascivious molestation and exhibition, and criminal use of personal identity - the Sheriff's Office has continued to investigate the case and track down children. More charges against Jackson could be filed.

In the three years the tall, slender man was a certified foster parent in the county, 104 teens lived in his south Brooksville mobile home for varying lengths of time. It remains unclear how many of the parentless children were abused.

The charges also have caused some to raise questions about why so many children were sent to live with a single man who allowed only teen boys to stay with him.

"Someone was not doing their job right," the 17-year-old said one afternoon last week in an interview with the St. Petersburg Times. "The signs were there. He only allowed teenage boys to come live with him. There were other allegations of abuse. They could have stopped this."

Search for justice

The teen, whose identity is being withheld to protect him as a victim of an alleged sexual crime, sat in a Brooksville restaurant sipping coffee. No cream, only sugar.

He was clad in a green hooded sweatshirt with a silk-screened Bob Marley on the front and a pair of jeans. His backpack sat on the floor next to his sneakered feet.

He said he wanted to talk because he wants to make sure someone is punished.

"There was only one incident with me," he said between sips from a white mug. "It took me a while to think about reporting it. At the time, there was just a lot of other stuff going on."

According to Kids Central records, Jackson was licensed as a foster parent March 31, 2003. At the time, Camelot Community Care of Marion County was the private agency subcontracted by Kids Central to license foster parents.

As of Jan. 1, Kids Central now handles the licensing on its own. Before, the agency handled only foster placement.

Kids Central spokeswoman Lynn Routh said that Jackson was considered to be a respite or temporary home provider. Of the 104 boys who resided with him, more than 50 stayed for only one night. Others, like the 17-year-old, stayed for several months.

"His home was like an emergency shelter," Routh said. "He took in teens no one else likes to take. It was a home that kids spent various lengths of time in. There weren't kids there for two years or longer periods of time."

Routh could not answer questions about whether there had been previous allegations of abuse at the home, which are considered confidential information. She also declined to comment on the current allegations because they are under investigation.

A pretty lonely guy

Before he went to live with Jackson in the white and brown-trimmed mobile home on Easy Street, the 17-year-old had stayed a month at the New Beginnings Youth Shelter in Brooksville.

He said staffers at the shelter warned him about Jackson. They said he was fickle, and was picky about who stayed in his home. They suggested that he keep busy at work and stay with friends.

So that's what the teen did. He worked as many hours as he could as a short-order cook in a Spring Hill pizza parlor. There was no homework to worry about since he had dropped out of Springstead High School his sophomore year.

The teen rarely came back to the mobile home -

maybe once a week to do laundry. He stayed with friends the rest of the week. He said Jackson was fine with it, as long as he still received the foster care checks from the state.

The teen noticed that Jackson didn't have many friends. People didn't come to visit at the house. If there were people around, it was usually the teen and another 17-year-old foster child who also lived there at the time.

"He was a pretty lonely guy," the teen said. "He was negative and never talked highly of other people, and I think that led him to not having very many friends. All he did was go to work. He seemed to be changing jobs every two weeks."

Deleon, the former caseworker, said that Kids Central knew of problems with Jackson before the teen went to live with him. The department was aware of two prior abuse reports, which he said were determined to be unfounded.

On Dec. 26, Deleon was fired by his employer, Harbor Behavioral Healthcare, which partners with Kids Central to oversee child welfare in Hernando and Citrus counties. He said he was told he had not reported the abuse soon enough.

Deleon said he didn't think it was necessary to file the abuse report on the Friday evening he became aware of the allegations because no children lived with Jackson at the time. The teen had since left and moved in with his manager from the pizza parlor.

"They were expecting this to blow up and got rid of me right away," Deleon said.

Teen's hard-knock life

The teen said living with Jackson for as long as he did was his only option if he wanted to stay in Hernando County. The lack of certified foster parents, especially those who accept teenage boys, meant that he would be sent to Ocala if he wanted to move out.

His mother, who lives in Spring Hill, had terminated her parental rights several months before, ending their long, problematic relationship. He said his father is an alcoholic and drug addict who lives in Tampa.

Until recently, he hadn't spoken to his older brother in seven years. He still lives in New York. The teen and his mother moved to Spring Hill from there five

years ago.

Noting burglary and domestic violence charges on his record, he acknowledges that he has also contributed to his troubled life.

The teen said his goal was to bide time in foster care until his 18th birthday. Then he might be eligible to take part in the DCF's independent living program, which helps emancipated foster children start out on their own.

In the meantime, he kept up his hours at the pizza place, where he's been employed for two years.

"I've been working all this time because I know I need to hit the ground running when I turn 18," he said. "I don't need anything screwing it up for me."

Soon, he has plans to move into his own apartment. He's looking around Spring Hill with a friend. He wants to get his General Educational Development diploma. He's thinking about going to vocational school.

Studies in fiber optics might be a possibility. His brother mentioned moving him back to New York, and getting him a job with Verizon, where he works.

A little more than a month after he first spoke about the alleged abuse, the teen has not heard from anyone at DCF or Kids Central about what happened to him. He has been in contact with a new caseworker about becoming emancipated before his upcoming birthday.

Tim Bottcher, DCF District 13 spokesman, said that his agency works closely with law enforcement when abuse cases arise.

"It's terrible, whenever you have someone in a position of trust like this and these sorts of allegations pop up," Bottcher said. "It's sad."

Times researchers Angie Holan and Cathy Wos contributed to this story. Chandra Broadwater can be reached at (352) 848-1432 or cbroadwater@sptimes.com.

FAST FACTS

Have information?

The Hernando County Sheriff's Office encourages anyone who may think they have been a sexual abuse victim of Kejerald C. Jackson, or anyone with more information about this case to contact the Sheriff's department at (352) 754-6830. Detective Steve Bishop is handling the case.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, KERI WIGINTON - Times: Kejerald Jackson faces charges of sexually battering boys while they were in his foster care at his mobile home in Brooksville. Jackson has been licensed as a foster parent since 2003. PHOTO: Kejerald Jackson is accused of molesting teenage boys while they were in his custody.

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